(In)visibility, sexualisation and social identity based impression management: a study of British women engineers

Abstract

In this article we use the term 'sexualised visibility' to describe how in male dominated work settings such as engineering, women are inscribed with sexual attributes that overshadow and obscure other attributes and values. From a career point of view, sexualised visibility is deeply problematic. However, as yet we have only limited understanding of how women in such settings navigate sexualised visibility and what this means for their careers. Drawing on social identity based impression management (SIM) to examine the career experiences of 50 women in petroleum, mechanical and automotive engineering in the UK, we develop new insights into the relationship between perception, power and relations of visibility. Specifically we identify the interplay between career stage and power and show how the strategies that women adopt to navigate sexualised visibility in their work settings vary by career stage. Furthermore we argue that women's collective efforts to ensure a favourable representation of their group leads to the reproduction of an implicit but powerful prescriptive gender stereotype which constrains their career progression.

Key words: sexualised visibility, career, social identity based impression management, gender, engineering

1. Introduction

> *When I joined I was just so shocked at the attention I attracted. Everyone was looking at me like I was some sort of creature it was so uncomfortable (*Rosemary)

> *I remember thinking 'Gosh, I like being married and everyone knowing I'm married, because then you can be nice and no-one's thinking that you're, you know, flirting with anybody'* (Tami)

The above quotes, extracted from our fieldwork, voice the frustration of women engineers who often feel excessively visible in terms of sexual appeal to the exclusion of other characteristics (APA, 2007; Barker & Duschinsky, 2012; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Kenny & Bell, 2011). This article explores how women engineers navigate this sexualised visibility. Drawing on Brighenti (2007), we are using the term 'sexualised visibility' to describe how in these work settings women are inscribed with sexual attributes that overshadow and obscure other attributes and values, circumscribing what is considered to be an appropriate and inappropriate presentation of self.

In highly skilled, male dominated work-settings such as engineering (Lewis & Simpson, 2010), women are at once excessively visible as sexual, aesthetic and emotional (Tyler & Cohen, 2010), but they are relatively invisible in terms of technical competence and leadership (Watts, 2010). From a career point of view, sexualised visibility is deeply problematic because it obscures technical competence (Gutek, 2013) and makes it difficult for women workers to build relationships with colleagues – both of which are crucial to career building in highly skilled sectors (King, 2005).

The literature makes important in-roads into the ways in which women manage gender based in(visibilities) in various work settings (Lewis & Simpson, 2010). However it is regrettable that there is still a lack of empirical research into how women in engineering navigate sexualised visibility, and what influences the strategies they use. In particular, we propose two areas for further development. First, although existing research offers important insights into women's quotidian experiences of in/visibility, our understandings of how these dynamics play out over time, as women seek to develop their careers, remain limited. Second the literature we have reviewed here depicts the process of navigating sexualised visibility as largely a matter for the individual, paying insufficient attention to how these might be part of broader, social processes. This is a significant limitation, given the importance of social dynamics for the representation of less powerful, stigmatised groups (Roberts et al., 2008; Kenny & Briner, 2013).

Reporting on an in-depth qualitative analysis of the career experiences of women engineers in the UK, this article aims to address these gaps. Specifically we focus on answering the following research question - how do women engineers respond to sexualised visibility and with what implications for their careers?

In order to answer this question, we draw on social identity based impression management (SIM). SIM recognises the importance of managing the impact of social identity based stereotypes on others' perceptions of one's competence and character (Roberts et al., 2015) placing professional image and social approval at the centre of career success. Second, ideas from SIM enable us to obtain a detailed understanding of the various strategies women engineers use to respond to sexualised visibility, how these strategies may vary across career stage and the implications of strategies on women's professional image. Third SIM recognises

flexibility and dynamism in people's responses to stigmatised social identities (Shih et al., 2013) and allows us to explore how women might act collectively to further the interests of their group.

Our research makes two important contributions. First, we identify the interplay between career stage and power and show how the strategies that women adopt to navigate sexualised visibility in their work settings vary by career stage. Second, we show how women's collective efforts to ensure a favourable representation of their group can lead to the reproduction of an implicit but powerful prescriptive gender stereotype (Heilman, 2001) which constrains their career progression.

2. In/visibility and the case of women engineers

Our study is based on petroleum, mechanical and automotive engineering in Britain. These are important sectors in which to examine women's career experiences because they continue to be male dominated and highly masculine in their processes and practices. Organizations within these sectors struggle to recruit and retain women, and women's presence remains stubbornly low. (Engineering UK, 2014). We consider these sectors to be 'extreme cases' (Saunders, 2012). Whilst we would not argue that these are the only sectors in which the apparent conflict between sexualised visibility and competence has consequences for women's experiences and for their career-making, findings generated in such contexts are especially vivid, thus providing valuable insights which can then be applied and examined in other settings (Saunders, 2012).

It has long been argued that women in engineering face a 'dense' masculinity (Harwood, 2010) that makes it difficult to access and be accepted into the places where power is located (Greed, 1991; Gherardi, 1995; Harwood, 2010; Climer, 2016). Scholars have used the concepts of

visibility and invisibility to shed light on how women experience such settings, where they are positioned, and with what consequences (Lewis & Simpson, 2010; Watts, 2010; Binns, 2010).

Lewis and Simpson (2010) offer two broad analytical approaches. Surface level perspectives, based on liberal feminism, use in/visibility to examine the numerical distribution of men and women, and its ramifications (Kanter, 1977). Of central concern here is how in settings such as engineering, where women are under-represented, processes of homophily work as mechanisms of gender-based social closure (Hatmaker, 2013). Because in such contexts women are excessively visible but sparsely distributed, they are often isolated from informal, but important, social networks. Paradoxically, their excessive visibility thus leads to their invisibility. Where peer evaluation plays a role in promotion processes, as in many organizations including our case study sites, this can be a significant obstacle to career progression. From this surface level perspective, as women's representation increases, these problems should be alleviated.

Deep level approaches, based on post-structuralism, focus instead on how power relations are maintained (and potentially challenged) through processes of in/visibility (Stead, 2013; Binns, 2010). The interesting twist here, according to Lewis and Simpson (2010), is that the dominant centre (where the power lies) is largely invisible, unspoken about and 'normal'. Its goal is preservation, but this too is implicit. The centre enjoys certain cultural privileges and works through homophilous networks to define priorities, values and codes of conduct, but again, these practices are largely unrecognised and unremarkable. Mindful of important distinctions within the field (Faulkner 2009; Ely & Meyerson, 2010), in engineering the persistence of masculine organizational cultures, materialised in daily routines and practices, types of humour and banter, dress codes, out of work social rituals, ensure that women are positioned outside of

these dominant groups and meaning systems, and to undermine their image as competent professionals (Male, 2014; Watts, 2007; 2010).

Lewis and Simpson's conceptualisation provides us with a framework for thinking about the literature, draws our attention to our level of analysis, and challenges us to consider where seeds of change might lie. However, in practice it is difficult to disentangle numbers and distribution from values, meaning systems, behaviours and power relations (Brighenti, 2007).

The concept of recognition is implicit in in/visibility, and is a clear example of the interplay of perception and power. Brighenti (2007) suggests that visibility is often linked to positive social recognition, legitimacy and access, but invisibility is a consequence of not being recognised, and is associated with disempowerment and marginalisation. In engineering settings, researchers have found that practices and cultures recognise and privilege stereotypically masculine attributes and actions over those that are stereotypically feminine (Gill, Sharp, Mills & Frantzway, 2008). For instance, in an ethnographic study of oil engineering, Faulkner (2009) found that, notwithstanding diverse versions of masculinity (Connell, 1995) social interactions are characterised by fraternal markers of familiarity and bonding. Women within these settings are marked as 'other' (Climer, 2016), lacking in recognition and access to the sites of power.

However, there is clearly not a simple dichotomy of visibility and positive social recognition on one hand, and invisibility and lack of recognition on the other. Rather, these processes play out in complex ways (Binns, 2010). Because the exercise of power is often hidden from view, such that it appears normal, unremarkable and unnoticeable, invisibility can signify one's membership to the dominant social grouping: hence, 'I am not noticed because I look like everyone else; people *recognise* me as one of them'. Alternatively, visibility can be negative

because the highly visible person becomes 'other' and thus requires extra control and containment (Brighenti, 2007; Lewis & Simpson, 2010). In their studies of women engineers, scholars such as Greed (1991), Watts (2010), and Hatmaker (2012; 2013) found that women are often highly visible in their organizations' administrative or customer-facing spheres (Binns, 2010), but invisible in technical or strategic ones.

This situation is exacerbated by the presence of sexuality. Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) proposes that women are looked at as objects, with a sexual focus being placed on their bodies, camouflaging their abilities. Likewise, Brighenti argues that because the 'asymmetry between seeing and being seen is a deeply gendered one' (2007: 330), with women typically objectified by the masculine gaze, processes of in/visibility are often sexualised. In his words, 'seduction is something that takes place in this sexualized dimension of visibility. Sight is a sense that can be violently close to lust' (2007: 330). In densely masculine settings, sexuality thus becomes central to relations of visibility. As women are looked at by men, they are objectified and sexualised (Twigg, 2006), linked to male desire (Guizzo & Cadinu, 2017).

Career-wise, sexualised visibility is deeply problematic for women engineers. Brighenti makes a distinction between what he calls 'fair visibility' and the

> zone of supra-visibility … where everything you do becomes gigantic to the point that it paralyses you. It is a condition of paradoxical double bind that forbids you to do what you are simultaneously required to do by the whole ensemble of social constraints' (2007: 330).

We see engineering organizations such as those included in this study as examples of such

zones. There are four important manifestations of this situation. First, where a woman's sexuality becomes 'supra-visible', it blots out her other characteristics (Kanter, 1977), obscuring analytical, rational and competitive dimensions. In engineering, where such qualities are critical for advancement, this is a significant obstacle (Gutek, 2013). Second, sexual visibility effectively cancels out a woman's leadership potential: one cannot be simultaneously objectified and seen as a viable, authoritative subject (Watts, 2010). In other words, recognition and legitimacy are significantly reduced (Brighenti, 2007). Third, as objects of men's desire, women are seen as distracting some men from their work (Gutek, 2013) and causing others to feel uncomfortable (Abbey, 1982; 1987). Thus they come to represent a kind of organizational dysfunctionality which negatively impacts on women, both individually and collectively. Fourth, a particular feature of engineering organizations is their 'work hard, play hard' cultures (Watts, 2007), typically characterised by long working hours followed by social gatherings in pubs and sports clubs. Women's supra, sexualised visibility makes it difficult for them to participate in these social rituals. In environments where out-of-hours socialising is necessary for gaining sponsorship, and ultimately to be recognised as promotable, this is problematic (Bagilhole, Powell, Barnard & Dainty, 2007; King, 2005). Importantly, it further amplifies the paradox between supra-visible sexuality, and invisible technical competence.

The question arises, what do women engineers do about the problem of sexualised visibility, of being objects of others' gaze? Although scholars have not answered this question directly, there is research that considers how women in diverse occupational sectors deal with issues of in/visibility. In environments where women are under intense scrutiny, some hide away (Tyler & Cohen, 2010; Loller, 2015) or carefully manage their presentation of self to fit in (Powell, Bagilhole & Dainty, 2009; Ainsworth et al., 2003; Olofsdotter & Randevåg, 2016). Others try not to attract undue attention, and to promote an image of themselves as competent

professionals (Haynes, 2008; Kenny & Bell, 2011; Binns, 2010; Powell et al. 2009). Scholars have argued that performing masculinity, managing femininity and/or distancing oneself from the feminine are seen as important ways of getting closer to the centre of power in organisations. According to Lewis and Simpson (2010), the closer people are to the centre of organisational power, the more likely they are to reap its advantages. In a study of engineers Watts' (2010) argues that the most successful women had acquired the cultural and social capital which enabled them to operate close to the centre. However, this strategy was only partly successful. Although these women were granted access to the powerful core, organisations used their femininity for business advantage (i.e. dealing with clients) rather than making them part of higher status, technical spheres. In the following section, we introduce social identity based impression management - the theoretical ideas that we use to frame our study.

3. Social identity based impression management

Social identity-based impression management (SIM) in work settings involves influencing others' perceptions of one's own social identity in order to project a desirable, professional image (Roberts, 2005). This may be done by decreasing the likelihood of being associated with negative stereotypes about one's social identity groups, and increasing the likelihood of being associated with positive ones. SIM is based on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When a person is seen as belonging to a stigmatised group, this poses an 'identity threat' (Roberts, 2005) and calls for social identity-based impression management.

Roberts (2005) differentiates between two approaches to SIM: social re-categorisation and positive distinctiveness. Social re-categorisation plays down social identity and highlights novelty to avoid categorisation, whereas assimilation emphasizes commonalities with the majority group and distinction from one's own group. For example, in male dominated,

masculinised work settings, researchers have found that some women often act like men in order to fit in (Powell, Bagilhole & Dainty, 2009; Ainsworth et al., 2003; Olofsdotter & Randevåg, 2016) and/or adopt male norms to position themselves as effective leaders (Binns, 2010). However, Powell et al. (2009) suggest that such people are often penalised for not being womanly enough (Powell et al., 2009), and thus face a double bind situation. Some individuals go to the extent of 'de-gendering' themselves by eschewing social relationships with 'feminine' women and treating them more harshly in favour of 'serious' men (Lewis, 2006) – a phenomenon popularly known as the 'queen bee' syndrome (Derks, Van Laar, & Ellemers, 2016).

Positive distinctiveness involves increasing the status of one's own group. This is done through enhancement (Roberts et al., 2014) - publicly embracing one's identity, educating others about its positive attributes, and advocating on behalf of the group (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). Two further approaches to positive distinctiveness are integration and/or confirmation. Integration involves 'attempts to incorporate a given social identity into one's professional identity by communicating the favourable aspects of the identity and challenging others' simplistic and negative stereotypes of that group' (Roberts, 2005: 696). Confirmation involves capitalising on existing stereotypes about one's own group and using them to further one's aims. For example, in a study of women police officers Harwood (2010) suggests that some women mobilise their femininity, using their subservient status to subvert male authority and engineer positive change.

Scholars have drawn on Roberts' (2005) ideas to examine the professional image construction activities of employees with various stigmatised social identities (Little et al., 2015; Ward & Ravlin, 2017; Roberts et al., 2008; Roberts et al. 2014; Kenny & Briner, 2013; Shih et al., 2013)

and developed these in the process. For instance, Kenny and Briner (2013) highlight how British Black Caribbean professionals de-emphasise their 'blackness' and increase their professional behaviour in a bid to improve the way their ethnic group is perceived. They argue that this approach may have combined elements of de-categorisation with social identity integration. However it is important to note that de-emphasising a particular social identity in order to avoid negative stereotypes can also involve losing the positive stereotypes attached to it. For instance, it is suggested that Asian Americans' use of avoidance tactics to de-emphasise their racial identity may be disadvantageous for them in terms of the loss of positive stereotypes such as technical aptitude and hard work (Roberts et al., 2014).

Although SIM has been used mainly in the study of ethnic minorities, a few contributions focus on women. For instance, Roberts and colleagues (2008) provide insights into how Black women attempt to highlight their positive distinctiveness. In contrast, Little et al. (2015) draw on a study of pregnant women to argue that individuals dealing with a changing identity are likely to focus on image maintenance and minimising loss, in contrast to the gain-focused strategies of those dealing with stable identities.

Thus we find social identity based impression management a particularly useful framework for examining how women engineers respond to the in(visibilities) they encounter because it places professional identity at the centre of career success, recognising the importance of managing the impact of social identity based stereotypes on others' perceptions of one's competence and character (Roberts et al., 2015). Drawing on SIM we address the following research question:

> How do women engineers respond to sexualised visibility and with what implications for their careers?

4. Research Design

Our study is based on one-to-one, semi-structured interviews conducted with 50 women engineers in three leading FTSE 100 organisations in the UK, in engineering roles. The first organisation, which we have called National Fuel[1], supplies fuel, energy, lubricants and petrochemicals to customers around the world. In the UK, the organisation is based on five sites and we interviewed respondents based in three of these. The second organisation, EngineCo, is one of the world's leading suppliers of gas and diesel engines. We interviewed women based in the main manufacturing facility which was initially a UK firm, subsequently bought by an American company. The third organisation, Luxe Autos, is a luxury motor manufacturer which is part of a multinational automotive company. Notwithstanding increasing diversity in some engineering fields, petroleum, manufacturing and automotive engineering remain predominantly male. While women from National Fuel described their organisation as high profile and modern, emphasising its highly educated multinational workforce and desire to increase its numbers of women engineering recruits, respondents from EngineCo talked about their organisation as a traditional men's territory, employing mainly engineers from the local area and often through apprenticeship schemes. Luxe Autos fell somewhere between these two extremes and was seen as a traditional company in the process of modernisation.

Respondents were identified through their organisations. We wrote to HR officers explaining our interest in studying women's careers in engineering and requesting access to potential respondents. At our request, these gatekeepers invited their women engineers to participate in the study and scheduled interviews with those who expressed interest. Participation was thus

[1] We have used pseudonyms for the organisations and respondents to protect anonymity.

entirely voluntary. Our 50 respondents were divided between early, mid and late career. We formulated the early/mid/late career distinction in relation to the specific dynamics of the engineering profession. Given that it takes four years to get the chartered status and long periods of training is necessary to specialise, we defined early career as less than 10 years in the industry, mid-career as 10-20 years and late career as over 20 years. We included women from these three career stages because the careers literature suggests that women's interests and preoccupations differ over career stage (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005) and we wanted our sample to reflect the range. Fourteen of our respondents were in early career, 29 in mid-career and seven in late career. See Table 1 below for summary of respondents.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

The interviews were held in meeting rooms onsite. Women were clearly used to having meetings in these spaces, and appeared to feel relaxed there. The interviews were conducted by the three authors (all women, all experienced interviewers). Prior to their interviews, all of the respondents had been sent a 'project information sheet' which outlined the focus of the project, what participation would involve, and described the ethical protocol. Meetings typically started with informal introductions, clarification of any issues arising from the information sheet, and a review of the ethical guidelines, ensuring respondents of confidentiality and anonymity. After the interview, respondents were invited to contact the interviewer post-interview should issues arise that they wanted to discuss further. None took up this offer.

Interviews were semi-structured, allowing respondents to introduce their own topics and also ensuring that the topics in the guide were covered. Notably, we did not set out to examine

sexualised visibility. Rather, in light of the persistently low numbers of women joining and remaining in engineering, our aim was to investigate what enabled some women engineers to stay on the career pipeline. Our interviews were designed to elicit women's career stories, from their childhoods and experiences in education, to their present positions, and future aspirations and expectations. We also asked them about their day-to-day experiences, career paths, support, enablers and those factors that constrained them.

The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The main data analysis technique was thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involves organising and analysing textual data according to themes. Initially a list of descriptive codes was inductively developed, representing the key themes respondents introduced. For example, 'leaving work dinners before the drinking started'; 'taking care with clothing and make-up choices at out-of-work events'; and 'being friendly in a carefully guarded way' are some examples of the first order codes. Once the initial codes were defined, we allocated sections of data notes to the appropriate codes. Although we adopted an inductive approach to coding, the literature on social identity based impression management and professional image construction (Roberts, 2005) informed the themes identified in the data (Little et al. 2015). We tried to ascertain the SIM strategies that people used to navigate sexualised visibility in their work settings. Thus our approach could be categorised as hybrid (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

All three authors/interviewers were involved in the coding process. The framework was continuously modified during the process of coding, using Hammersley and Atkinson's (1997) notion of 'progressive focusing'. We also examined all data which were not associated with a particular code and looked out for contrasting and minority views to ensure that our analysis was based on all of the respondents' voices. We re-read the contents of each code and discussed

them between ourselves to develop our understandings of the individual codes and relationships between them. Through this extensive discussion of data, codes and descriptors, we ensured a high level of inter-rater reliability.

Specifically, once data from all 50 interviews had been coded at the first order, descriptive level, we moved to second order conceptual codes. For instance, the first order codes noted above were amalgamated to form 'limiting presence in out-of-hours interaction' and 'striking a balance between friendliness and appropriateness'. Finally, from the second order conceptual codes we developed third order, aggregate ones. These are the strategies that we report in the findings: confirmation and enhancement (positive distinctiveness strategies); and avoidance and assimilation (social re-categorisation strategies).

5. Findings: Examining sexualised visibility in automotive, petroleum and mechanical engineering

As interviewees narrated their engineering lives, they talked at length about the sexualised nature of their workplaces, how they felt excessively visible and objectified, how male colleagues viewed their appearance and how their interactions with men were closely policed by vigilant onlookers. They also explained how they had to work hard to prove their expertise and competence, and how they navigated these significant but unspoken imperatives: how they presented themselves and how they managed interactions with male colleagues. Indeed, persisting on the career pipeline was described as partly a matter of managing themselves in light of underlying assumptions and implicit requirements. In the process of describing their own experiences, they also compared them with others', moving fluidly between their stories and comments about women 'in general'. Thus, there appeared to be an important social dimension to their accounts. In the following section we first provide evidence of the problem:

accounts of pervasive sexualised visibility in their workplaces and its implications for career-making. In the second we draw on SIM to examine how women engineers say they navigate this imperative.

5.1 *Pervasive sexualised visibility in engineering and its career consequences*

Respondents from all three organisations agreed that the female body stands out in their workplaces in a sexualised way, attracting undue attention. Jen, a junior engineer from EngineCo, outlined her frustration that no matter what work she was doing, some of her colleagues saw her first and foremost as a potential date:

> When I first started I think I was kind of unprepared for the amount of attention. I did have a lot of men just casually slip in asking me out. "Oh, could you help me with this drawing? And by the way, shall we go for a drink?"... I got quite annoyed that they would assume that because I was a girl even though I was at work I was somehow up for grabs (Jen, EngineCo).

A significant consequence of sexualised visibility was that women's interactions with men were closely scrutinized and frequently misunderstood by others – by women as well as men. In particular, early and mid-career women from all three organisations complained that collegial conversations with men were seen as flirtatious and even seductive - and deemed inappropriate:

> If you're too friendly they might see that as flirting. If you're not friendly then you're a bitch. It's a very fine line, very difficult, because when I thought I was just being friendly you hear you're being accused of being flirty (Hillary, EngineCo).

> When you're just being friendly with someone and they'll be like "Oh, why are you flirting?" It's like I wasn't flirting, I was just talking to them. And I think I'm very, very conscious of stuff like that at work (Luana, EngineCo).

Thus echoing Brighenti's (2007) synthesis of politics and aesthetics in the dynamics of in/visibility, a recurrent theme in these data was respondents' sense that they were being watched and judged by people who could make a difference to their fate within their organizations. To survive in engineering, women had to carefully manage their interactions with men.

Paradoxically, though, strong collegial relationships and social networks were critical to career advancement in all three organizations (King, 2005). Women argued that good relationships led to valuable career advice, help on work related tasks and leads on jobs (Hezlett, 2005):

> I would say in the manufacturing industry, it's a male dominated world and it's important to establish working relationships with people (Tanya, EngineCo).

> In a business like this – I think it's very important to be able to relate to different people and try and build on that social relationship to get the best out of people in terms of sponsorship (Rachel, National Fuel).

However, building such relationships with men was challenging in work environments where women were associated with sexuality. Social networks were likewise double-edged for women engineers: precarious for the reasons introduced above, but at the same time critical for career advancement. Sarah, from National Fuel, explained:

> You've got to have a good network of friends at work. Honestly, it's not always the smartest person that excels. It's the people that have a good network (Sarah, National Fuel).

Similarly, Cathy from EngineCo noted:

> If somebody knows you and somebody knows what you're like at your work and that you can do the job well – that's only going to help you. In terms of getting a job over someone else, it is important to know a lot of people and to know who to go to for information and to have people know what (Cathy, EngineCo).

In Sarah's and Cathy's experience, positions in high status projects and offshore assignments were often publicised through word of mouth. Taking on these challenging projects was important for career progression; yet for women, gaining access to the networks that led to them was by no means straightforward. In our dataset this appeared to be a problem for respondents at all career stages, but particularly those at middle and junior levels who were in the process of establishing themselves as competent, 'promotable' engineers.

Significantly, excessive attention to the body also diverted the focus away from women's perceived technical capability and interfered with their work. Linda from EngineCo explains:

> It was a real shock to come here. Everyone on the shop floor was male and it was like the dark ages. I used to walk round out there and literally the track would stop – watching. It was weird. When I first started one of the machines I used to look after was something called ACT, advanced cold test, and that used to be on the corner of the track; so you could stand there and just about everybody could see you and they all used to have radios and I was chattering away to the team leader of this area, the area I was

> looking after, and they were on the radio talking about me. "Oh, Linda's out in her overalls. Look, she looks nice today. What's she done to...? I wonder who she's chatting up now" (Linda, EngineCo).

Linda felt that her competence was obscured by her body (Gutek, 2013). Rather than being known for the quality of her work on the ACT machine, the focus was on how she looked in her overalls or who she was 'chatting up'. In this environment which prioritized technical competency and where colleagues' support was central to career advancement, sexualised visibility could significantly impede women's reputation and their progress.

More insidiously, respondents were concerned that women were seen as progressing due to their looks rather than their competence. Layla from Luxe Auto explains:

> There'll always be somebody who says "oh it's only because she's got breasts and a backside to look at". That's how she gets by (Layla, Luxe Auto).

Here Layla is not referring to herself, but to women in general. This is a good example of how, as noted earlier, in their narratives women often moved seamlessly from their own experiences to ideas about women generally.

Anne, from National Fuel explained how a woman's body is seen as having the potential to destabilise men:

> I've had some male colleagues talk to me about naivety of younger women's dress. I mean everyone should be able to wear what they wear, but I think they should have some self-awareness of the impact it has on others. So some women, particularly in the

> summer, are wearing quite revealing clothes. It will naturally destabilise any red-blooded male (Anne, National Fuel).

In Anne's work context, it was widely accepted that a woman's body is potentially disruptive to the normal operation of the organisation (Acker, 1990; Burrell, 1992; Kenny & Bell, 2011). Furthermore it was implied that women should have some self-awareness of this potential, thus legitimising the process of social policing. In the next section we explore women's responses to sexualised visibility.

5.2 *Navigating sexualised visibility: Respondents' SIM strategies*

In this section we draw on SIM to examine our respondents' approach to sexualised visibility in their organisations. Four strategies emerged in our data, two which focus on positive distinctiveness: confirmation (Roberts et al., 2005) and enhancement (Roberts et al., 2008); and two oriented to fitting in: avoidance (Roberts et al., 2014) and assimilation (Roberts et al., 2005). We discuss each in turn.

5.2.1 *Confirmation*

Confirmation is an approach to positive distinctiveness that involves strategically claiming existing stereotypes about one's group and using them to one's own advantage (Roberts et al. 2005; Roberts et al., 2008). Women confirmed by playing established, non-sexual gender roles in the workplace. This approach was adopted predominantly by women in early career. A number of respondents positioned themselves as daughters and sisters in their interactions with male colleagues and/or played out these roles when male colleagues positioned them in this way (Kanter, 1977). This not only helped to open career 'doors', (fathers/brothers enjoy helping their daughters/sisters) but also removed any possibility of sexual provocation. Rosy

from Luxe Autos explained how she takes on a sister role to enlist her male colleagues' help, without risking negative repercussions:

> I've got blond hair and I do make blond jokes and I'll say "yeah, I know I'm asking a stupid question." Tell me what you're doing. Tell it me like I'm a five year-old," they're like a bunch of my big brothers or my dad and actually playing the girlie card a little bit sometimes can actually help diffuse some of those situations (Rosy, LuxeAutos).

Amelie discussed how performing the role of a daughter had helped her to develop a good relationship with her manager. Based on this relationship she was given a range of opportunities which ultimately led to a desired position overseas:

> The job that I was doing when I first joined National Fuel was based in Project X and I got on very well with my line manager at the time. Then he got posted to Y and he knew I wanted an overseas posting... Once he'd moved there he found a job for me there basically and that's how I got that job. He's a similar age to my dad and he's got a daughter my age and we have quite a close relationship in lots of ways because we can relate to each other. So he was kind of more of a father figure, if you like, and he treated me more like a daughter when we worked together (Amelie, National Fuel).

Through confirming familiar stereotypes, Amelie gained certain career advantages. However, we might wonder whether women who used a strategy which effectively infantilized them ultimately secured their junior status. Indeed, several women complained about being patronized by 'fatherly' male colleagues. As Jenny from National Fuel recounted:

> And there are other ones who very much give you the feeling of 'You're a little girl, I'm the installation manager with 20 years of experience, therefore I know what I'm talking about, therefore you should shut up and go away' (Jenny, National Fuel).

Patriarchal relations at work thus potentially constrained women from making decisions, taking leadership and showing creativity. For instance, when awarding challenging assignments, 'daughters' and 'sisters' who need frequent assistance, guidance and care, might not be seen as the most promising candidates.

5.2.2 Enhancement

Enhancement, the second positive distinctiveness approach that emerged in our data, involves publicly embracing the stigmatized identity, educating others about its positive attributes, and advocating on behalf of the undervalued group (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Roberts et al., 2014). This approach again was most commonly adopted by respondents in early career. Women who used this approach adopted an explicitly feminine appearance and demeanor. Far from attempting to neutralize or moderate their femininity, they openly embraced it. However, in presenting themselves as stereotypically female in terms of their dress and some aspects of their behavior, they also challenged these stereotypes by demonstrating high levels of competence, and engineering expertise, and by not being afraid to 'get their hands dirty'. Thus their positive distinctiveness strategy worked hand-in-hand with a challenge to the prevailing social order. Becky from EngineCo explained how she defied the stereotypes she confronted as a result of her long blonde hair, make up and manicured nails:

> It's kind of a running joke now with my nails because I change my nail colour pretty much every couple of weeks. I'm on the shop floor and I'm helping with tooling … I mean I get all sorts of excited looks and questions like "How can you function with those nails? And I tell them to move over and I get some gloves on and do it (Becky, EngineCo).

Becky created a self-image that synthesized a complex combination of stereotypical femininity and stereotypical masculinity. In doing so she avoided possibilities of erasure. She was highly visible *both* in terms of her appearance, *and* her engineering competence. Having proven herself as an engineer, Becky won her colleagues' respect. She thus embraced a previously devalued form of femininity, and rendered it acceptable.

Yolanda from National Fuel likewise adopted a strategy of enhancement in a story about her early days on off-shore oil platforms:

> I had my nails done, I had my long hair, I still wore my makeup. The only thing I didn't have were my heels. I had to prove myself which is what life is about. I kept working on a professional basis, they knew I was dependable and I knew how to get things done out of them. So where other people struggled to get information or to get others to do things for them I just basically had to ask and they'd do it. I am a woman. I'm not going to try to be a man. (Yolanda, National Fuel).

Yolanda was aware that her hair, makeup and nails drew attention to her sexuality, especially in the offshore environment. However, like Becky (and in contrast to the majority of our respondents), she did not deploy a re-categorization strategy in order to blend in or prove her competence. Rather, she was determined to embrace her femininity whilst proving her competence. By showing that overtly feminine women can also be skillful, efficient, committed and collegial, Yolanda challenged the argument that a woman's sexuality overshadows her other characteristics. By securing the respect and acceptance of men on the platform, she felt she was challenging prevailing gender stereotypes.

5.2.3 Avoidance

Avoidance is a re-categorisation strategy that involves downplaying the devalued identity to avoid negative categorisation (Roberts et al., 2014). The majority of our respondents who adopted this approach (mostly in mid-career) navigated the precarious line between what was seen as respectable behaviour and behaviour that was inappropriate, through limit or self-restraint, on-going vigilance and self-monitoring. This inevitably involved playing down their femininity. Women were well-aware of the career consequences of getting it wrong (Sommerlad, 2002). Clara from EngineCo explained:

> I'll be friendly but not too friendly. For some women it is - being too friendly to build strategic relationships with people, but I've always been very cautious about that, particularly being an engineer – I don't want to be misinterpreted. I want to be respected (Clara, EngineCo).

Thus Clara played down her devalued gender identity, arguably limiting empathy and care in her interactions with male colleagues. In other words, Clara was careful to not appear 'too feminine' because this had potential to lead to misinterpretation. She firmly believed that winning respect involved carefully moderating her interactions with men and avoiding misinterpretation (Sheppard, 1989).

Women also attempted to neutralise the potentially sexual nature of interactions and self-presentation by limiting their participation in social events in order to avoid discomfort or embarrassment. Senior manager, Tanya, from EngineCo explained how she leaves business dinners before too much alcohol is consumed, limiting her interactions with men, and distancing herself from being seen as a sexualised women, thus downplaying expectations of her gender category:

> If you go out for a dinner – and I've done this many times in business dinners – there's drinks afterwards I'll stay around for one cocktail or something, but then I go off before the guys get really drunk and the jokes start (Tanya, EngineCo).

Business dinners were commonplace in Tanya's organization, and as a senior manager she was expected to attend. She explained that such dinners typically started out formally, but as colleagues had more to drink, the conversation became more raucous and the humour more sexualised. Tanya made a point of taking her leave before this happened, in her words 'striking a balance' between collegiality and appropriateness.

Other respondents similarly spoke of their efforts to avoid social censure: 'I don't want people talking behind my back' (Nathalie, Luxe Autos); 'Nobody wants to be outcast' (Amelie, National Fuel). Through carefully managing their relationships, respondents sought to escape such condemnation. However, from a career point of view, this could be disadvantageous in an industry where many jobs are advertised on a word of mouth basis and awarded on the basis of personal contacts.

As highlighted above, women who showed a 'lack of moral virtue' were subjected to sexual jokes and rumours, and seen to succeed because of their sexual wiles rather than their engineering competence. This appeared to be widely recognised, and it is notable that in all three organisations, women compared their own approaches to other women who '*used their femininity*' to get on. Charlotte, from Luxe Autos expressed frustration that other women's behaviour could impact on her reputation:

> I have a big issue with women that perhaps wear shirts that you can see through and skirts that don't leave much to the imagination… I don't like that and I don't like the

> fact that ultimately it puts us all into a category and men think we're all the same (Charlotte, Luxe Autos).

Charlotte's quote suggests that the management of one's image was not a wholly individual matter. Rather, it also had a powerful social dimension - there was more than one observer for women engineers to deal with and significantly not all of the observers were men. Indeed many of our respondents worried about how other women's behaviour could adversely affect their own standing and sought to distance themselves from those who they felt 'used femininity to their advantage by being nice and flirtatious' (Angelika, National Fuel). Such behaviour was seen as jeopardising not only the career chances of the woman concerned, but all women engineers. Luana explained how women who breached acceptable codes of conduct were policed by other women and told to 'downplay' their devalued identity to avoid negative categorisation:

> I think (NAME) particularly used to wear quite short skirts and she used to wear like spaghetti strap tops, the ones with the really thin straps, and people used to make comments about them and I know she was told by other women to sort of tone it down at one stage (Luana, National Fuel).

Luana's account highlights how women monitor and police other women to ensure favourable presentation of their group in the workplace. Thus social identity based impression management was not simply undertaken on an individual basis. It was also social, and involved the policing of others.

5.3.4 Assimilation

Assimilation is an approach to social re-categorisation that is based on demonstrating commonalities with the majority group, and distinction from one's own group (Roberts et al. 2005). Explaining how they dealt with sexualised visibility, respondents talked about how they attempted to 'fit in'. They did this in two ways. First, around a fifth of respondents from across the three career stages attempted to make their gender invisible through the way they dressed and the things they talked about. Katrina, a manager at National Fuel explained:

> It's nice to fit in, right? So there'll be times when I'm sitting around with managers and we're all wearing the same shirt. Like I've worn a button-up shirt and they're all wearing their blue button-up dress shirt and then we're talking about fishing and I'm just like 'Wow, that's like really nice'… That makes this a lot easier (Katrina, National Fuel).

Through her choice of clothes and conversation topics, Katrina not only avoided sexualized objectification (Watts, 2010), but more positively, she was able to bond with her colleagues. Similarly Maeve, from Luxe Autos, explained that coming from a tough Merseyside neighbourhood meant that she was not a 'girly girl' and that could discuss football with the men 'in their language'. This enabled her to develop good working relations with her team. However, although her strategy had proved successful on an individual level, it could be argued that collectively it reproduced the idea that the only way women could get on in this environment was to become one of the guys.

A second, less popular approach to assimilation was acting in stereotypically masculine ways: assertive, authoritative, combative. This strategy was more common in late career women interviewed and they used it in both reactive and proactive ways. In the case of the former, Linda recounted her response to the men on the shopfloor who had commented on her overalls:

> I just got on the radio and I said "Excuse me, I know who that is. Shut the **** up," and radio silence and that was it. They just suddenly thought Oops (Linda, EngineCo).

Linda was angry about how her colleagues had objectified her, and decided to stand up to them, 'like a man', through direct confrontation. Following this incident, she never again encountered such remarks, and was convinced that her behaviour had facilitated her acceptance on the shopfloor.

However, this assimilation strategy did not always have such positive consequences. Senior respondents who behaved in a similarly assertive way managed to avoid sexual objectification, but as a result were subjected to name-calling and abuse: 'ice queen', 'Cruella', or 'just a bitch'. Tracey the most senior respondent in our Luxe Auto sample explained:

> … I know that I am tough – I have had to be, but I'm no tougher than any of the other managers but I know they call me Cruella behind my back (Tracey, Luxe Auto).

In other words, respondents who adopted stereotypically male behaviours paid a price.

5.3 *Summary of findings*

In sum, we have drawn on ideas of social identity based impression management (Roberts, 2005) to discuss the strategies that women engineers adopt to deal with sexualized visibility in the workplace, highlighting the implications of each approach for individuals' careers. We report our findings in Table 2 below.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

This table outlines four distinct approaches to navigating sexualised visibility specifying *how* each approach is enacted, who it is enacted by and its potential career implications. Strategies

range from positive distinctiveness approaches such as confirmation and enhancement, which make gender highly visible, to social re-categorisation: the avoidance approach which carefully manages gender visibility through a combination of limit and balance, and finally assimilation which focuses on making gender invisible. We recognise that the substantive content of the four approaches can be in a continuous state of flux as women workers continuously manage their sexualised visibility. Although the majority of respondents placed themselves at a single position, it is of course possible to deploy these strategies variously (Mavin & Grandy, 2010).

6. Discussion

In this article we introduced the idea of sexualized visibility to the careers literature, illuminating how issues of representation and power play out in the career experiences of highly skilled women engineers. Scholars have previously suggested that sexualised visibility renders invisible women's perceived competence (Gutek, 2013; Watts, 2007), credibility and social acceptance in work organisations (Cregan, 2006). Our findings confirm this point. However, our data also show that 'being watched' is not a passive process. Rather as Brighenti has argued, 'visibility is a site of strategy in which individuals can choose to contest their visibility' (2007; 326). The women in our study navigated sexualised visibility in order to maintain their engineering credibility and progress their careers. We drew on ideas of social identity based impression management (Roberts, 2005) to examine how they did this.

Previous research has offered insights into how women manage gender in response to (in)visibility dynamics in the workplace: attempting to render themselves invisible (Tyler & Cohen, 2010; Loller, 2015) or to blend into dominant cultural prescriptions and groupings (Powell et al. 2009; Ainsworth et al. 2003; Olofsdotter & Randevåg, 2016; Binns, 2010). Using what social identity theorists refer to as social re-categorisation strategies (Roberts, 2005;

Roberts et al., 2014; Kenny & Briner, 2013), women effectively 'neutralise' their femininity, and instead draw attention to their professional and technical attributes. Our findings on avoidance and assimilation strategies echo this line of argument, and illuminate the career implications of such manoeuvring: the development of collegial relationships and access to career-making opportunities. We also identified two strategies aimed at capitalising on positive distinctiveness: confirmation (Roberts, 2005) and enhancement (Shih et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2014). The following discussion details the main contributions of our study.

6.1 Managing sexualised visibility: The interplay of career stage and power

As we have noted, much of the existing work into responses to in/visibility examines the experience of work in the here and now – with little consideration of career dimensions and implications (eg how these dynamics play out over time). In the study reported here, we 'captured' career in two ways: through our early/mid/late career sample, and through our respondents' retrospective accounting.

In our analysis, career stage emerged as a central, distinguishing feature. Significantly, mid and late respondents reported using social re-categorisation strategies, while early careerists more frequently drew on positive-distinctiveness. Specifically, the majority of respondents in late career (and a few in mid-career) attempted to assimilate (Roberts, 2005). This allowed them to fit in and interact with men in a non-sexual way. Rendering their gender invisible was a (partially) successful, individualised career strategy; we term this partially successful because, consistent with the literature (Powel et al., 2009; Ryan & Haslam, 2007) women who behaved like stereotypical men were prone to harsh judgements. With its emphasis on blending in and making their gender invisible, assimilation sustained and maintained men's dominance in the engineering field.

Many early career engineers, in contrast, used positive distinctiveness strategies: for example by confirming their social identities (Roberts, 2005) and adhering to socially accepted roles (e.g. daughters and sisters) to build relationships and secure opportunities. As we have seen, this was a morally 'safe', but conservative approach. In contrast, those who used the strategy of enhancement (Shih et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2014) embraced stigmatised and sexualised aspects of their identity, whilst at the same time reclaiming competence and professionalism. This was a more transgressive strategy, offering scope for change. The former led to the establishment of supportive relationships, but at the same time reproduced existing stereotypes about the role and position of women in engineering. The latter, in contrast, offered new ways of being a woman engineer. In light of our analysis, we propose that favourable recognition (Brighenti, 2007) can likewise be a matter of creatively exploiting one's positive distinctiveness to gain access and credibility. The mobilisation of enhancement strategies offers seeds for change: creating new ways of being women engineers and likewise offering greater possibilities for organizational change.

The play of power is central to Brighenti's conceptualisation of in/visibility: it underpins who is rendered in/visible by whom, and with what consequences. Thus it follows that managing sexualised visibility is partly a process of manoeuvring around key power bases. Indeed, as Lewis and Simpson argue, 'the closer individuals or groups lie in relation to the norm, the more likely they are to secure access to its privileges' (2010, p. 10). However, as Watts (2010) and Harwood (2010) remind us, what happens once one gets close to 'the centre' is not inevitable, and can result in simply confirming and ultimately reproducing existing stereotypes.

Our research further develops this debate. A striking feature of the analysis we presented is how individual's approaches to managing sexualised visibility are mediated by a combination of career stage and power dynamics. Late career women appeared to be more able to assimilate to the majority by adopting masculine behaviour and exerting their authority. In other words, their seniority appeared to give them a symbolic sense of power (Bourdieu, 1990) which enabled them to establish themselves within the norm. Notably, they had joined the organisation at a time that there were very few women and therefore assimilation was arguably one of the few options they had to position themselves. However, those in mid-career seemed to find it harder to assimilate to the centre of power. Younger than their late career colleagues and of lower hierarchical status, they were arguably more visible in a sexualised way, and thus faced a different set of strategic choices. For these women who were effectively 'caught in the middle', avoidance was perhaps the most viable option (Kenny & Bell, 2011). In contrast, women in early career were more likely to argue that they felt empowered to contest their visibility and deviate from normative behaviours. These women positioned themselves at potentially stigmatised social locations to get what they wanted. We see this agency to resist as part of the emerging post-feminist climate characterised by individualism, choice and empowerment (Lewis, 2014).

It is important to point out that the table we presented does not represent a 'cookbook' of strategies, available to any and all who want to use them. Rather, the extent to which they are accessible, the ways in which they are deployed, and with what consequence is, at least in part, a matter of career stage (the opportunities and constraints of these particular moments); the play of power within the organization; and the relationship between these dimensions. We also speculate that it is linked to wider social and cultural exigencies, although this is beyond the scope of the current study.

6.2 Managing sexualised visibility as a social process: Maintaining respectable femininity

Our second contribution relates to the ways in which women at all career stages police themselves and each other. We argue that women's efforts to ensure a favourable representation of their group leads to the construction of an implicit but powerful, prescriptive gender stereotype (Heilman, 2001) which constrains their career progression. The women engineers in our sample not only closely scrutinized themselves to ensure they were seen as acceptable and legitimate within prevailing prescriptions, but also policed one another's dress code and interactions with men to ensure that a colleague's 'inappropriate' presentation does not spoil the field for their group. In terms of Brighenti's (2010) twinned concepts of aesthetics and politics, the gaze was not restricted to men. Rather, the gaze served as a vehicle for women to contain and control themselves and others, thus becoming a powerful form of self-discipline and intra-gender policing.

Feminist scholars have provided insights into how women compare, contrast and distance themselves from other women through notions such as the queen bee syndrome (Derks, Van Laar & Ellemers, 2016). In contrast to these understandings, the respondents in our sample did not act purely in individual interest. Rather they acted in the collective interests of the group. They monitored each other to ensure that their group was represented in a positive way, illuminating how surveillance takes place *within* marginalised in-groups who are surveilled by 'significant others' (Mead, 1959).

Consistent with respectability politics (Harris, 2014), in which marginalised groups attempt to police their own members, presenting their social values as compatible with the mainstream, the majority of women in our sample monitored one another to ensure that their social values were compatible with the mainstream, rather than challenging the mainstream for its failure to

accept difference (Gross, 1997). This is essentially a conservative approach. Far from contesting the system's inherent inequalities, it assumes that those who are disadvantaged should do what they can to look and act like those in power (Harris, 2014). Through their collective behaviour, we argue that these women contributed to creating a powerful, prescriptive gender stereotype (Heilman, 2001) which specified the importance for women engineers to moderate their gender to ensure that men were not disturbed, and/or that the identity of the serious engineer was not challenged. The normalized, 'matter of fact' nature of this stereotype effectively camouflages its underpinning restrictiveness, thus rendering it invisible (Lewis & Simpson, 2010).

Our analysis shows how through engaging in self-regulation and intra-gender policing, women reproduced an implicit, prescriptive gender stereotype which constrained their careers and maintained the extant gender order in their profession. We thus extend existing scholarship on gender based in(visibilities) (Kenny & Bell, 2011; Powell et al., 2009; Harwood, 2010; Watts, 2010; Binns, 2010) by showing how visibility operates as a social and political process (Brighenti, 2007), generating potentially paradoxical consequences.

6.3 Conclusion

In this article we examined how women engineers respond to being inscribed with sexualised attributes in their work settings which was deeply problematic from a career point of view. We found that women's approach to navigating sexualised visibility is mediated by a combination of career stage and power dynamics. Furthermore, we found that the process of managing sexualised visibility operates as a social process which contributes to the creation of a powerful, prescriptive gender stereotype.

6.4 Limitations of the study and avenues for further research

Our study is based on 50 interviews and thus cannot be generalized to all women engineers. However, the purpose of qualitative research is not generalizability, but rather inductive theory building through rich in-depth data. Indeed, as we outlined earlier, we had not planned to study sexualised visibility. Instead, the issue arose unprompted during the course of our interviews. We invite scholars to develop our findings. First, it is important to examine how sexualised visibility and the approaches adopted to navigate this play out in different occupational sectors and/or organizations. Whilst in engineering, women's representation and power was low and there were negative stereotypes about women in general, sexualised visibility might play out very differently in occupational contexts where women are better represented in senior positions. Second, in our discussion of the relevance of career stage to patterns of strategic manoeuvring, we suggested that the current post-feminist environment might help us to explain early careerists' use of positive-distinctiveness approaches. We see this as a fruitful avenue for further research. Certainly, engineering firms, and indeed any work organization, operate in a dynamic social and cultural context. Thus the relevance of residual, dominant and emergent cultural prescriptions (Williams, 1977) for career-making is a fundamental, but under-researched question. Finally, whilst in our study positive distinctiveness appeared to be most available to early career stage women, it could be that career stage is not the only relevant dimension from which to consider issues of accessibility. For example, based on the work of Johnson, Sitzmann and Nguyen (2014), it would be interesting to investigate whether people who are seen as 'attractive' have more symbolic power to use strategies of positive distinctiveness and/or if they feel a greater need to manage sexualised visibility through avoidance. We did not consider attractiveness as a dimension in our study and we are not in a position to judge our respondents' attractiveness. However, we identify this as an important avenue for future research.

TABLE 1: Summary of respondents' demographic details

Organisation	Early career (<10 years)	Mid-career (10 to 25 years)	Late career >25 years	Married/partner	Number with Children
National Fuel	6	11	2	9 (47%)	8 (42%)
Engine Co	4	9	3	11 (68%)	7 (43%)
Luxe Autos	4	9	2	10 (67%)	6 (40%)

TABLE 2: Strategies for managing sexualised visibility

Approach	**Definition**	**Ways of enactment**	**Who is it enacted by?**	**Career implications**	**Implications on the gender order**
Confirmation	Strategically claiming existing stereotypes about one's group and using it for one's own advantage	Playing established, non-sexual gender roles in the workplace	Early career women	Enables relationship building and leads to career favours without compromising moral reputation. Positions women as weak, uninformed and need of guidance which might backfire when considered for positions of authority.	Maintains normative expectations
Enhancement	Publicly embracing the stigmatized	Adopting an explicitly feminine	Early career women	Increased acceptance of female	Challenges the perceived

	identity, educating others about its positive attributes, and advocating on behalf of the undervalued group	appearance and demeanor *and* demonstrating high levels of competence, and engineering expertise		engineers creates greater opportunities to advance.	conflict between competence and femininity
Avoiding	Downplaying the devalued identity to avoid negative categorisation	Attempting to neutralise the potentially sexual nature of interactions. Self-presentation through a combination of limit and balance.	Mid-career women	Compromises important career-building behaviours such as networking and relationship development.	Positions gender as an imperative which women must manage
Assimilation	Demonstrating commonalities with the majority group, and distinction from one's own group	Making gender invisible through dress and interaction	Late career women	Enables relationship building through blending in.	Reinforces the view that competent engineers are men
		Acting in stereotypically masculine ways: assertive, authoritative, combative	Late career women	Assertiveness is often interpreted as aggression. Unpopularity is disadvantageous for leadership positions.	Reinforces the view that competent engineers are men

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Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the British Academy Small Research Grant, SRG 2011-12

Dedication

When we were working on the revisions for this paper, Laurie’s precious daughter, Izzi, was killed in a cycling accident. Izzi was a feminist, an adventurer, and she lit up the world with her love. This paper is dedicated to her.